obsession, but that's not a great leap forward. One essay is a mildly interesting defence of her hobby—knitting beanies—which she calls "a desire for self-worth outside the neoliberal framework". Not exactly *revolución o muerte*, comrade Yas.

All right, I shall try to be fair. There is one piece in the book with a bit of utopian spark, and it even had me cheering her on. It begins with great promise: "I fantasise about giving up my Australian passport." While she concedes that her citizenship does confer a few benefits such as ease of travel (and generous, taxpayer-funded residencies in France), that may not be enough, if she is to remain true to the revolutionary spirit.

Things escalate quickly, as what really irks Abdel-Magied is the entire Westphalian system of nation-states, and she looks forward to its abolition and replacement (suggestions welcome, apparently, as none are offered). Throwing away the passport, you see, is not only a middle finger to Australia, but a rejection of the very concepts of borders, migrant controls and even citizenship itself.

She arrives at such a radical position via the impossibility of non-indigenous belonging in Australia, anyway. Our shameful colonial sins—inexpiable, I guess—make our presence here forever illegitimate: "Why, if I had the choice, would I bind myself, legally and psychologically, to a nation-state founded on the dispossession of the oldest continuous living civilisation on Earth?"

Here, she channels the fashionable lamenting about living on unceded land and whatnot, the mark of our progressive, correctly educated elite. It all has a touch of performative insincerity about it, though; there's something about their acknowledgments of country every five minutes that's hard to take seriously. What I finally like about Abdel-Magied, as she fires up about the "blood-drenched soil in so-called Australia", is that she has the courage of her woke convictions and takes such thinking to its logical but unsatisfying conclusion: she drops by the Department of Home Affairs website to inquire about the process for renouncing citizenship (not as easy as she hoped, it turns out).

Still, a few points for effort, I suppose. In the end, Yassmin Abdel-Magied isn't much of a theoretician of the revolution, as her main talent is for yapping on about Yassmin Abdel-Magied. I haven't offered too many good words for this book, so let me finish by adding that the most cheering thing about *Talking About a Revolution* is its plaintive tone, a recognition that the attempt to remake the world isn't going particularly well, and there is, as ever, still so much work to be done.

Not to worry, though. While the neoliberal order remains not yet overthrown, she has books to sell and literary festivals to attend, where everyone can have a nice chat about the need for more conversations about the upcoming revolution. Thankfully, for now at least, that's all it is: talk.

Timothy Cootes lives in Sydney and contributes frequently to ***Quadrant Online****. He reviewed Noah Rothman's* ***The Rise of the New Puritans*** *in the September issue.*

James Franklin

Knowing What We Are Worth

The Worth of Persons: The Foundation of Ethics
by James Franklin
Encounter Books, 2022, 272 pages, US$30.99

This is an edited version of the book launch speech by the philosopher James Franklin in Sydney in November.

The essential message of this book is that humans are ethically important in an absolute sense. The universe would be much worse off if it lacked them. It would be worse off if it lacked individual ones, such as yourself. The explosion of a lifeless galaxy is just a firework, the death of a human is a tragedy. Because humans are completely different things from stones.

That's it, really. Depending on where you're coming from, you're likely to think, either, I know that, it's a platitude, what is he going on about? Especially if you're a literary person you might think that, as classic literature is often about the importance of persons and what happens to them. Or, you'll think, I've studied a bit of philosophy and science, that's incompatible with everything I know, it doesn't fit in with a scientific world picture and it can't possibly be right …

There is some more to the story. If humans are of inherent value, dignity and worth, it should be possible to say what it is about them that gives them that worth. And if they do have worth, that has implications for ethics in the sense of what to do.

The take-home messages are three: first, humans are precious (valuable, having dignity, or worth) absolutely; second, it's possible to say what properties of them make them that way; and third, ethics in the sense of right and wrong actions follows from that but down the track. First things

first. Axiology before casuistry.

Those are not standard words, so let me explain. Axiology is the theory of what is inherently valuable. Casuistry is the theory of which actions are right and wrong, and includes everything to do with rights, duties, dilemmas, "issues", obligations, commandments, care, virtues. Most of what you see in ethical talk is about those, about casuistry. Now, I love subtle casuistical debates on right and wrong—if you go to a book launch and consume the free food and drinks, are you morally obliged to buy the book? (The answer is no—of course not, the author invited you to come and celebrate, you've done that by turning up.) But central to ethics they aren't.

If you've come to an ethics book launch expecting a sermon on what you ought to do, you'll be disappointed. It's more a lecture on who you are.

The point of view of the book is that casuistry is not basic to ethics, axiology is. We need to start with what things are valuable, and why, then we can get on with right and wrong. For example, if we establish that humans are valuable, then we can understand why murder is wrong: it destroys something of value.

So what does give humans worth? A classic answer is "rationality". "Humans' excellence," says Saint Augustine, "consists in the fact that God made them to His own image by giving them an intellectual soul which raises them above the beasts of the field." It's a good start—rationality really is exceptional in the universe and very special—but as an answer it's too simple. Shakespeare has a quick sketch that suggests some complexity: "What a piece of work is man," says Hamlet. "How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, In form and moving how express and admirable, In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god ..." Hamlet is right that possession of such properties as reason, apprehension, the capacity to act freely, emotional structure and individuality confer on humans a moral weight, a nobility, dignity, or inherent worth that makes what happens to humans important in an absolute sense. It is not just any one property, such as rationality, it's a complex suite of them.

> *The worth of persons is not neutrally scientific—you can't see it in a microscope or extract it from data—but it's not about oughts either, because it's not a command or about action, it's a property of things.*

The next section is for people who are more expert in ethical theory—but I think everyone can understand the main idea: it's how this theory addresses Hume's is–ought problem. That's a famous problem raised by David Hume in the eighteenth century: he says that truths about what "ought" can't follow from facts about what "is": for example, facts about what society enjoins, or what God commands, or what leads to the greatest happiness of the greatest number are just facts that so to speak lie there—they can't imply anything about what you *ought* to do. There is, Hume says, a fundamental logical gap between "is" and "ought". There's something right about that—you won't get ethics out of scientific truths. One of the more colourful philosophers of the seventeenth century, Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz, proposed to resolve the main controversies of ethics by ruler-and-compass construction. I think we can all see why ethics doesn't lend itself to that. Some have concluded that if ethics doesn't arise from science it doesn't exist. That's not a good idea.

So, back to the worth of persons, their inherent value or dignity. Is it an "is" or an "ought"? It isn't exactly either, but in between. It's not neutrally scientific—it's about worth, which you can't see in a microscope or extract from data—but it's not about oughts either, because it's not a command or about action, it's a property of things. It's a stepping stone in the middle of the is–ought gap.

So we cross the is–ought gap in two steps. Here's how. There's a scientific properties–worth gap, and a worth–obligation gap. The first one is crossed by the notion of supervenience. That's a technical term that needs explaining, but you can get the idea of how it works via a parallel case that has nothing to do with ethics: the way that what you should believe depends on the evidence. The evidence in a court of law is just the facts and their logical relations, for example, the evidence that Cardinal Pell couldn't have been at the scene of his alleged crime. That determines necessarily what the jury should believe. Right belief supervenes on the evidence. Similarly, properties like rationality and individuality, themselves not strictly moral, determine that humans have moral worth.

There'll be time for a few questions later but first let me answer one that I'm sure some people are asking. Is God in it?

The answer is, in the main, no. Dostoevsky's famous saying, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted," is completely wrong. If God does not exist and humans are just the same as if he does

exist, then they have the same inherent properties and hence the same worth, rights, duties and so on. The worth of persons is inherent to them, not conferred by God—or by society or by "self-esteem" either. (Maybe just as well, given the young people of today are giving away literal belief in God.)

Having said that, God, if he exists, could still have some relevance. The saying of the book of Genesis that "humankind is made in the image of God" is one of the most dramatic claims ever made for the high worth of persons. Jesus says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." Those are unusual claims in ancient texts. I imagine God thinking that humans were being so slow working out the worth of persons, simple as it is, that he'll have to reveal it.

Two thousand years later, it still needs saying. In today's *Australian*, Senator Jacinta Price writes, "Every Australian is entitled to equal dignity and respect, regardless of our background and upbringing, and regardless of how many generations our forebears have been here." She is right that people in remote communities don't have the same protections against extreme violence as we do.

There could be some problem about whether you can have an objective worth of persons in an atheist materialist universe. I may write a book about that, but it isn't this book.

Other questions—What about cats? What about rainforests? Do they have any degree of worth? If people have worth, do they have equal worth? … Good questions, but time does not permit … You'll have to read the book.

Ben Crocker

A Book for Australia

Conservatism: A Rediscovery
by Yoram Hazony
Swift Press, 2022, 480 pages, $49.99

Princeton-raised, Israel-residing political philosopher Yoram Hazony is the figurehead of the nascent Euro-American National Conservatism movement. Increasingly, his ideas are entering mainstream political debate. The 2022 National Conservatism conference in Miami opened with a speech from the now highly favoured Republican presidential hopeful, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Coalescing around him are a growing number of thinkers, young and old, intent on rejuvenating a movement which they acknowledge has largely failed to conserve that which it holds most dear.

I have attended two of Hazony's conferences in the United States, and found them invigorating—earnest and open forums of debate, attracting public intellectuals and private citizens alike, all sincerely interested in building a better future for the nation.

Much of Hazony's thinking has found its way into his latest book, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*. Though I am sure he did not expressly intend it, I believe Hazony has written a book about Australia.

The book is about Anglo-American conservatism—that is, the instantiation, perpetuation, collapse and prospective *renewal* of an authentic conservatism in the British and American bodies politic. This does not mean Hazony excludes the rest of the world from his project. However, the scope of his inquiry is necessarily focused on the reception of conservative thought in the two world-powerful English-speaking nations. In Hazony's telling, their historic narrative unfolds from the pre-Burkeans, through the American Federalists, and onwards to contemporary resonance in the political conservatism of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Hazony, more than any other contemporary writer, has understood that in telling this story, there is an urgent concomitant task to be undertaken. That task is the disentanglement of Anglo-American conservatism from Enlightenment liberalism.

That is why I say that Hazony has written a book about Australia. Because it is Australia, more than any other polity in the English-speaking world, that has confused, and still does earnestly confuse, the central tenets of these two related but philosophically distinct schools of political thought.

It would be a disturbing read for any sitting conservative in the Australian parliament. Indeed, delving into Hazony's 400 pages would require not just a confrontation with the last ten years of Liberal-National governance, but also with the quietly missed opportunities of the Howard years, and with the very foundation of modern Australian conservatism in the formation of the Liberal Party under Robert Menzies.

Hazony argues that, amongst other forces, the trauma of the two world wars drove Anglo-American conservatives to a *rapprochement* with Enlightenment liberalism. This optimistic marriage set off a chain reaction leading to the rapid